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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001736

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: IMPACT OF ACCESSION

REF: A. A. USEU BRUSSELS 01090

[1](#)B. B. USEU BRUSSELS 01094

[1](#)C. C. PRAGUE 00461

Classified By: USEU Poloff David Armitage for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Until now, politicians from the ten accession states have only been observers of the European Parliament (EP). We expect a culture clash when these observers become full-fledged members. They are generally younger and look at the EP as a vehicle for political advancement. They are also more likely to pursue national, vice "European," interests (although national cooperation probably will fade over time). We doubt the overall balance of power between European political groups will change very much. The generally pro-U.S. outlook of many accession state parliamentarians will be tested once they enter the EP. END SUMMARY.

Series of Pre-Election Reports

[1](#)2. (SBU) This is the third in a series of cables exploring the June 10-13 European Parliament (EP) elections, focusing on the expected impact and potential influence of MEPs from the countries set to join the EU on May 1. Previous cables (reftels A-B) provided general background on the European elections campaign and the role of the EP in the EU decision-making context. Subsequent telegrams will go into more detail on the role of U.S.-EU relations in the elections, re-election prospects for key MEPs, and possible realignment of party groups.

Brussels confusing but good training ground

[1](#)3. (SBU) As a general rule, new members view serving in the EP as of more benefit to them than current members do. Many EP observers consider working in Brussels as an essential launch pad for their political careers and a definite plus for making it big back home. This is certainly the case in the Czech Republic (reftel C), but also in Hungary and other parts of Central Europe (less so in the Baltic states, Malta, and Cyprus). The young, talented future stars in national politics are cutting their teeth in Brussels and Strasbourg. (18.5% of the EP observers are under 40, compared to 6.4 percent of the MEPs) This contrasts with a traditional attitude in the current EU-15, where the EP is sometimes perceived as a place for those in the autumn of their careers or who could not make it in the national arena. Jozsef Szajer (European People's Party - Christian Democrats, Hungary) and Agnes Vadai (PES - Party of European Socialists, Hungary) both remarked that their experiences had helped them be better politicians back in Budapest. Interestingly, Szajer (age 42) plans to run for a seat in the June election, while Vadai (age 29) plans to return to the Hungarian parliament in Budapest. Both plan to go where their respective parties should be in the majority. As both noted, it is no fun to be in the opposition.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In contrast, Magda Kosa Kovacs (PES, Hungary) said that what would be important over the long term would be to have competent professionals working in Brussels and Strasbourg. She stressed that one should already have some experience and proven political skills before becoming an MEP. According to (the 64-year old) Kosa Kovacs, "The EP is not for people in their early 20's." Kosa Kovacs (and others) also complained of the difficulty in grasping the opaque and complex EU legislative process. The terminology, rules, and procedures were confusing, leaving many observers frustrated.

Bluebloods meet Blue Collar

[1](#)5. (SBU) Besides increasing the EP's size from 626 to 732, EU enlargement will bring stylistic changes. The EP observers we spoke with commented on how the European Parliament is a debating club - very formal and "proper." This contrasts with the down-and-dirty, rough-and-tumble political style in many Central and East European states, they said. Szajer noted how combative politics are in Budapest. Vadai said that current MEPs are rushing to pass legislation before May

1 because they fear how the new members might vote, given their "take-no-prisoners" political style. The Strasbourg style is very different. There is plenty of "nice talk and philosophy," but the accession states are more used to "fighting" and seeking "practical" solutions.

Greens Influence May Wane

16. (SBU) Of the 162 EP observers, only one (from Latvia) is a member of the Green political group. This is quite a contrast to the numbers in the current EP, in which Greens comprise almost 8 percent of MEPs. Even Socialists such as Vadai noted that pushing for the environment was not a big campaign plus. If given the choice between resources for environment or resources for people, Vadai said that she would choose the people. Thus, the sway of the Greens in the Parliament may diminish somewhat, but it will depend on the numbers: The future MEPs from the accession states will comprise only 22% of the entire European Parliament. Therefore, even if the MEPs from the accession states have strong views, their influence will be felt only if they can place themselves on key committees or succeed as rapporteurs. The new MEPs will have to fight for these plum positions.

National Trumps Partisan...for Now

17. (C) Many of the accession-state observers we spoke with view their role as defending national interests in Brussels. As Vadai mentioned, accession states saw three basic models to dealing with the EU: the British (Thatcher's rebate - rolling back EU agreements in pursuit of national interests); Finnish (follow everything); and Austrian (ask for opt-outs). She said that Hungary was adopting a mixture. For too long, Vadai said, accession state capitals were told to do this and that by Brussels, and many are biding their time to push back. Vadai said she could hardly wait to begin pushing back once she can vote as a full MEP in May.

18. (C) For many from the accession states, national identity will remain very important - but probably only in the short term. For example, Vadai and Szajer, although they are from opposite sides of the political spectrum, were consistent in saying that their loyalty was national first and partisan second. Part of this is the feeling that the accession states need to "catch up" to the current EU-15. Szajer said that there might also be ad-hoc cooperation among the Central European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia), but that there would be nothing formal. Such regional coalitions probably would be rare and would be determined by the particular issue under consideration. He also noted that nationals would receive regular briefings and that national interests would be pursued through the parties. EP Observer Toomas Ilves (PES, Estonia) noted that his party was the only one in his country not to use a variation of the slogan, "Protecting Estonia from the EU."

19. (C) A final remark concerning nationality: some of our EP observer interlocutors were sensitive to the possibility of being treated as inferiors from the more established western European democracies. Vadai said she was chastised by a Spanish MEP (presumably a fellow Socialist) during the run-up to Iraq for her country's stance in favor of U.S. policy. The MEP said Hungary was not abiding by "European solidarity." She wondered whether such treatment would continue after May 1.

110. (C) COMMENT: Given experiences from past enlargements, however, national cooperation probably will fade over time since the EP is structured to steer members toward partisan coalitions rather than national coalitions. As one academic expert told us, "It will be hard for the new members to remain nationalist because the EP simply doesn't operate that way." The generally pro-American attitudes among accession state parliamentarians will be sorely tested once inside the EP, where anti-American views run deep, and pressures to conform will be significant. END COMMENT.

SCHNABEL